

INNOVATIONS LAB

GENERAL F.A.Q.

What is the Innovations Lab?

The Innovations Lab is an Alliance journey through which a nonprofit with a proven record of success will receive support as they expand or introduce a program that will make a meaningful impact on those they serve to further their mission and vision. The Innovations Lab consists of research, technical assistance, consulting, training, community engagement, peer-to-peer learning, and an opportunity to connect with a funder.

What do you mean by scale?

- Geographically: Expanding something you are already doing in one location and bringing it to a new group of stakeholders
- Breadth of Offerings: Expanding what you already do to include new services that are aligned with your mission

Who is in the Lab?

- Nonprofits with at least two years of proven success, supported by data
- EIA (Excellence in Action) certified organization
- Organizations that have identified a need and have begun to formulate ideas for a potential solution

Where does the Lab take place?

The Lab journey occurs in a variety of spaces. Participants will meet in groups, individually, and one-on-one, both in person and virtually. They will conduct presentations to the community, and meet with Alliance staff and consultants. Each participant will be prepared for an in-person meeting with a potential funder. Participants are expected to complete specific steps and action items on their own time.

What is the role of the Alliance?

- Assist with conducting research
- Facilitate training
- Identify a potential funder
- Coordinate video production
- Coordinate consulting
- Assist in planning your community presentation

How is the Innovations Lab innovative?

The Alliance serves both nonprofits and philanthropy, making us uniquely positioned to bring the two sides of the same coin together for strategic engagement. The Alliance already engages in capacity building, nonprofit management certification, and networking efforts. When a nonprofit wants to enter the Lab, we can support them to-and-through it and prepare them for the pairing opportunity with a potential funder. For funders, we can ensure that nonprofits who want to meet with them are ready for that opportunity and have gone through an intensive process of constructing their initiative.

Approaching community problem-solving with this collaborative approach ensures that nonprofits and funders have their respective interests represented and can come together in a way that breaks through traditional funding structures. This process will position organizations on an equal footing, with a clear understanding of their equally vital roles. At the completion of the Lab

- nonprofits will be able to do the work they are passionate about and skilled in without funding directing the work
- nonprofits will have strong narratives that will enable them to continue their development efforts, which will lead to sustainable success
- funders will see a greater return on their investments
- funders will have long-term collaborative partners
- communities will tackle challenges in meaningful well-researched and developed ways.

What is the intersection between the Lab and volunteerism/service?

- Organizations that have already been doing important work for the community will be able to expand their geographic reach. This means more service opportunities.
- Services that are provided in the Innovations Lab include custom research, market analysis, support in constructing an enhanced concept note and business plan. This data and guidance will help organizational leaders and boards make meaningful informed decisions. As we know, some of the most critical volunteers of nonprofits are board members. This support will help them be more effective in their stewardship roles.
- Organizations that participated in the Lab pilot reported greater board member satisfaction.
- When an organization completes the Lab, they are likely to be set up for significant growth in development. This, in turn, means they are more likely to achieve a sustainable future. This will allow them to continue to be a trusted partner in the community where volunteers feel safe and excited to dedicate their time and resources.
- Participants in the IL spend considerable time working on storytelling and examining how to meaningfully communicate the impact of their organization. Part of that narrative includes the experiences of their volunteers and the power of the service they provide. The acknowledgment of the importance of their work is critical to volunteers, who need to feel valued to continue serving.

